

THE
AUTHENTICITY
OF THE
FOUR GOSPELS.

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THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Argument of the Tract.

THE evidence furnished by the opening passage of the Acts of the Apostles to the authorship of the third Gospel, the internal evidence of the Acts to the personality of the author and the various circumstances which identify him as St. Luke are pointed out. The medical language which permeates both the Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles is shown to confirm this conclusion. The admissions of M. Renan with reference to St. Luke's authorship of the books are adduced, and the value of them as embodying the conclusions of a hostile witness is indicated. St. Luke is shown to have had ample opportunities of instituting inquiries into the truth of the facts which he records, and a comparison between him and Tacitus as historians in this respect is instituted. The establishment of the authenticity of St. Luke's writings is shown to obviate practically the objections to the other three Gospels. Those Gospels are proved however to rest on sufficient evidence. The value of M. Renan's conclusions as invalidating the force of the objections of sceptical criticism is pointed out, and the admissions of distinguished negative critics are quoted with reference to their fundamental objection to the authenticity of the Gospels, namely, the fact that the writers record supernatural events.

THE

AUTHENTICITY OF THE FOUR GOSPELS.



THIS is a question which during the present century has been discussed with the most intense eagerness. Perhaps there is no other on which such an

The eagerness with which the question has been discussed.

amount of critical labour has been bestowed, or which in its various aspects has occasioned so much excitement. The controversy began at the latter part of the last century; it was brought to a crisis, which aroused anxiety throughout Europe, by the publication in the year 1835 of Strauss's *Life of Jesus*. His criticism was succeeded by that of the Tübingen school, founded by Baur. The challenges thus offered to the faith of the Church were met by numerous and able theologians both in Germany and in this country; and every point in the argument has been contested with the utmost keenness. The prolonged and vehement character of this contest is certainly not disproportioned to its importance. Nothing can be of more consequence to Christians than to know whether they have good reason for their belief

The beginning of the controversy.

The importance of the controversy.

The Gospels
not the sole
grounds of
our faith.

that in the four Gospels they possess four faithful records of the life, the teaching, the death, and the resurrection of their Lord and Master. We are by no means, indeed, entirely dependent on those records for the grounds of our faith, since the Epistles of St. Paul, even if they stood alone, would afford strong testimony to the main facts respecting our Lord which are asserted in the Christian Creed. But the Gospels alone afford us full information respecting our Lord's character and work; and they must ever be regarded as the most precious and important of testimonies to His claims.

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It is this, indeed, which has led the sceptics and unbelievers of this century to direct such persistent and fierce attacks upon the Gospels. It has been felt that if they are trustworthy records of what our Lord said and did, the chief positions for which sceptics have contended are at once overthrown. Christ Himself bears witness in those Gospels to His own claims, to His supernatural powers, to all that Christians believe respecting Him. In fact, all cardinal questions of religion are practically answered if the Gospels can be trusted. Our Lord there bears overwhelming testimony to the existence and character of God, to the fact that we are now under God's government, and shall hereafter be judged by Him, and to the truth that He Himself can alone save us from our sins and their consequences. Accordingly, the simple facts of the

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Gospel history were from the earliest moment the sum and substance of the Apostles' preaching. In the tenth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles we have a record of St. Peter's first address to a Gentile audience ; and it is like a brief summary of one of our Gospels. He tells Cornelius "How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power : who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed with the devil ; for God was with Him . . . whom they slew and hanged on a tree ; Him God raised up the third day, and showed Him openly ; . . . and He commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is He which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead. To Him give all the prophets witness, that through His name whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission of sins." Such has ever been in substance the message of the Gospel. The chief question which has exercised the minds of men in our own time is whether the four records we possess of that Gospel can be relied upon.

The facts of Gospel history the sum and substance of the Apostles' preaching.

Can the Gospels be relied upon ?

Now, if we wish to know whether any narrative or statement which we cannot ourselves verify is true, the first question to be asked is, On whose authority does it rest ? Is it reported to us by persons who had the means of knowing the facts, and whose accounts can be trusted ? If such accounts were written by contemporaries who

Were the writers well informed and trustworthy

either themselves witnessed the events narrated, or who were intimately associated with such eye-witnesses, we have the highest kind of evidence which in historical matters is possible. It will be necessary of course to inquire further into the honesty and good judgment of such writers ; but the first and most important inquiry must be whether their evidence is that of contemporaries. This accordingly is the point which has been chiefly challenged by writers who wish to discredit the trustworthiness of the Gospels ; and it is the main question to which we shall address ourselves. By whom were the Gospels written, and when ? If there is good reason to believe that they were written by Apostles or intimate friends of Apostles, the main objections which have been raised to their credibility within this century will at once fall to the ground.

By whom
were the
Gospels
written, and
when ?

Now, notwithstanding the elaborate character of the controversies which have been raised respecting this question, it will be found that the case can after all be very simply stated. It might be supposed, from the manner in which the problem is generally discussed by opponents of the Christian faith, that some elaborate and far-fetched argument is necessary in order to vindicate the received belief respecting the Gospels. There could not be a greater misapprehension. It is the case of our opponents that is marked by these characteristics ;

The case a
very simple
one.

our own is perfectly straightforward and simple. The four Gospels bear upon their title-pages, as we should now say, the statement that they were written by St. Matthew, St. Mark, St. Luke, and St. John. That is the way in which, from the earliest date, the words, "according to Matthew, Mark, Luke, John," were understood. No suspicion can be shown to have been entertained by any writer of the first few centuries that these inscriptions had any other meaning, or that the meaning thus implied was untrue. Now, if in our own day a book appears with a name purporting to be that of the author on the title-page, and not a single doubt is expressed during his own lifetime or the lifetime of any of his friends as to the fact of his having written it, who would doubt that he had done so?

The Gospels attributed to St. Matthew, St. Mark, St. Luke, and St. John.

No doubt entertained as to the authorship in the first few centuries.

It is not merely with respect to modern books that this principle is acted upon; it is equally adopted with respect to ancient books. The works of Sophocles or Thucydides bear their names; and as the authorship was never doubted in ancient times, we accept it still, unless positive external or internal objections to the contrary can be adduced. But the burden of proof lies on those who urge such objections. If certain books have borne the names of certain authors unquestioned for centuries, we have a right to demand very cogent evidence from those who would have us reject this constant

The burden of proof lies on objectors

The question is, Why should we not receive the primitive and accepted belief?

consent. In short, from the first moment they are heard of, these four books were accepted as the work of the writers whose names they bear. The question is not why should we believe that they were written by those persons; but why should we not believe it?

What the Gospels say for themselves.

But this is only a preliminary step. The most natural and the fairest course is to inquire, in the first place, what the Gospels say for themselves. It is reasonable to allow a witness to speak for himself before we listen to any evidence in opposition to him. Now it so happens that, although the authors of the four Gospels are singularly reticent respecting themselves, two at least of them have incidentally afforded us indications which, in the opinion of all critics, are extremely significant of their individuality and of their positions. This is peculiarly the case in respect to the Gospel of St. Luke; and it will be found the simplest introduction to this part of our subject, if we begin by considering the books which are attributed to him. For in this case we start with the advantage that we have two books on which to base our judgment, instead of one. The book of the Acts of the Apostles opens by a reference to a former book by the same author, and that reference, combined with internal evidence, leaves no practical doubt that this book was the Gospel according to St. Luke. "The former treatise have

The writings of St. Luke.

The Book of the Acts of the Apostles refers to the Gospel by the same writer.

I made, O Theophilus," says the writer, "of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, until the day in which He was taken up." But the Gospel according to St. Luke treats of the subject thus defined, and it is similarly addressed to Theophilus. It is moreover generally recognized, even by some of the chief rationalistic critics to whom reference will subsequently be made, that the two treatises are marked by a singular unity of style, idiom, and thought, that one mind conceived the two books, and one hand wrote them. If we can determine who was the author of one of them, we know the author of the other.

It is addressed to the same person.

The style of the two books is the same.

Now, the authorship of the Acts of the Apostles is revealed by one of those pieces of incidental evidence which, in a matter of this kind, are sometimes more convincing than direct statements. In the 16th chapter the writer is describing one of the journeys of St. Paul, and at first he speaks of St. Paul and his companions in the third person. Thus, in the 6th verse, he says "Now when *they* had gone throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia . . . after *they* were come to Mysia, *they* assayed to go into Bithynia; but the Spirit suffered them not." A vision appeared to Paul in the night bidding him go over to Macedonia; and here the writer suddenly changes his expression, and begins to speak in the first person. In the 10th verse he proceeds, "And after he had seen

Internal evidence of authorship in the Acts of the Apostles.

Connection
of the
author of the
Acts of the
Apostles
with St.
Paul.

the vision, immediately *we* endeavoured to go into Macedonia." It is natural to conclude that at this point the writer joined St. Paul's company. He proceeds with him to Philippi; but appears to have remained there when St. Paul passed on to Amphipolis, as he resumes the third person at the commencement of chapter xvii. But in the 5th verse of chapter xx., where it is described how St. Paul again passed through Philippi when going through Macedonia on his final journey to Jerusalem, the writer begins again to speak of what "we" did. From that time he speaks as though he were constantly in St. Paul's company. He arrived at Jerusalem with him, and was received with him by St. James (xxi. 17, 18); and when St. Paul's imprisonment at Cæsarea was terminated by his appeal to Cæsar, the writer accompanies him on his voyage, suffered shipwreck with him, and arrived with him at Rome (xxviii. 16).

References
in St. Paul's
Epistles to
his
companion.

Now from some references in St. Paul's Epistles, there remains no practical doubt who was the person thus associated with St. Paul. In Col. iv. 14, St. Paul sends a salutation from "Luke, the beloved physician;" in 2 Tim. iv. 11, he says, "only Luke is with me;" and at the end of the letter to Philemon, the salutation of Luke is added, among others, to that of St. Paul. St. Luke therefore was an intimate companion of the Apostle; and there is no other known companion to whom the

circumstances mentioned in the Acts are appropriate. Thus the internal evidence which is furnished by the third Gospel, by the Acts of the Apostles, and by St. Paul's Epistles, is in complete harmony with the tradition that St. Luke was the author of both the Gospel and the Acts. A further piece of very striking internal evidence has been added within the last year. St. Paul speaks of Luke as a physician, and it had already been observed that the descriptions of our Lord's miracles of healing in the third Gospel bear traces of the hand and eye of a medical observer. But an Irish scholar, the Rev. Dr. Hobart, published last year a full investigation of what he describes as *The Medical Language of St. Luke*,¹ and he points out the following facts: that we find running throughout the third Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles a number of words which were either distinctly medical terms, or commonly employed in medical language; that we find a constant use of the same compounds of simple words which the medical writers employ, and that these are for the most part peculiar to this author, or that he makes more frequent use of them than the other New Testament writers; that he alone uses the special medical terms for the distribution of nourishment, blood, nerves, etc., through the body, as well as the medical terms for

The evidence of the Acts of the Apostles and St. Paul's Epistles in harmony with the tradition that St. Luke wrote the third Gospel and the Acts.

The evidence from the use of medical language.

¹ *The Medical Language of St. Luke*, by the Rev. W. K. Hobart, LL.D. London, 1882.

Medical language permeates the whole of the third Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles.

‘stimulation,’ and to denote an intermittent or a failing pulse ; that there are some words confined to St. Luke and the medical authors in the sense which they bear in his writings ; and that the medical style of St. Luke accounts for the very frequent and peculiar use made by him of some words which were habitually employed, and were indeed almost indispensable, in the vocabulary of a physician. This peculiar phraseology, moreover, permeates the entire extent of the third Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles, and thus adds a strong evidence of the integrity of those writings.

The circumstantial character of the evidence.

Here, then, we have the ancient tradition that St. Luke, the companion of St. Paul, wrote our third Gospel corroborated by various convergent evidences of a very striking character. Now, it is only reasonable to ask that before evidence of this consistent nature is rejected, very clear objections to its validity should be established. No doubt the evidence is in the main circumstantial, and not demonstrative, and it is conceivable therefore that it might be refuted by counter evidence, or by strong objections based on its internal inconsistency. But it is important to observe that the burden of disproof is on the side of the objector ; and he ought to be able to make out at least as clear a case on the other side before we can be asked to abandon conclusions which have such a weight of traditional and circumstantial evidence in their

Counter evidence should be equally clear and strong.

favour. This being premised, we proceed to inquire to what the objections amount.

It fortunately happens that this inquiry may be very briefly satisfied. It would be equally tedious and unsatisfactory to pursue in detail the innumerable doubts which critics have urged on this subject. But if we are able to adduce a practically impartial estimate of the value of all these objections—an estimate not made by a believing theologian, but by a sceptical critic, who entirely rejects the main teaching of the Gospels as Christians believe it—in short, by one who is in every sense of the word an outside observer, we may feel satisfied that we are in possession of a fair measure of the force of the objections. Such an independent witness we can call upon in the person of M. Renan. The general character of his views respecting our Lord is well known. He entirely disbelieves in any miraculous occurrences, and assumes that whatever reports we have of them, in any historic document whatever, must by some means or other be explained away. He is, therefore, for our purposes, of even more value than a strictly impartial witness. He is a hostile witness; he is prejudiced beforehand against the literal trustworthiness of a document which contains accounts of miracles, and it would be an assistance to his argument if it could be shown that such a document was not the work of a person who had had access to contemporary evidence.

The
testimony
of M. Renan

M. Renan a
hostile
witness.

What, then, is the testimony of M. Renan? It will be found in the Preface to his *Vie de Jésus*, 15th edition, p. xlviii. The passage substantially corresponds to that portion of our argument which has hitherto occupied our attention. He says:—

M. Renan's admissions.

“It is known that each of the four Gospels bears at its head the name of a personage known either in the apostolic history or in the evangelical history itself. It is clear that if these titles are correct, these Gospels, without ceasing to be partly legendary, assume a high value, since they enable us to go back to the half century which followed the life of Jesus, and even, in two cases, to eye-witnesses of his actions.”

The reader will here notice M. Renan's position. He considers that parts of the Gospels must under any circumstances be regarded as legendary, and therefore, as we have observed, he cannot be prejudiced against criticism which would assign them to authors of a late date. But he proceeds—

The character and authorship of St. Luke's Gospel.

“As to Luke, doubt is scarcely possible. The Gospel of St. Luke is a regular composition, founded upon earlier documents. It is the work of an author who chooses, curtails, combines. The author of this Gospel is certainly the same as the author of the Acts of the Apostles. Now, the author of the Acts seems to be a companion of St. Paul,—a character which accords completely with St. Luke. I know that more than one objection may be opposed to this reasoning; but one thing at all events is beyond doubt, namely, that the author of the third Gospel and of the Acts is a man who belonged to the second apostolic generation; and this suffices for our purpose. The date of this Gospel, moreover, may be determined with sufficient precision by considerations drawn from the book itself. The twenty-first chapter of St. Luke, which is inseparable from the rest of the work, was certainly written after the siege of Jerusalem, but not long after. We are, therefore, here on solid ground, for we are dealing with a work proceeding entirely from the same hand, and possessing the most complete unity.”

Now, M. Renan's opinions as to the exact date of St. Luke's Gospel, whether a few years before, or a few years after the siege of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, and his prejudice respecting the legendary character of some of the narratives in the Gospel are clearly separable from his critical judgment as to the person by whom the Acts of the Apostles and the third Gospel were written. If he allows that those two books were written by a companion of St. Paul, who, beyond any reasonable doubt, was St. Luke, we may form our own opinions as to the conclusions to be deduced from this admission. But it may be important to observe that the admission has been supported by M. Renan's further investigations, as expressed in his subsequent volume on *The Apostles*. In the Preface to that volume he discusses fully the nature and value of the narrative contained in the Acts of the Apostles, and he pronounces the following decided opinions as to the authorship of that book, and its connection with the Gospel of St. Luke (p. x., *sq.*) —

M. Renan's critical judgment as to authorship separable from his opinions and prejudices on other points.

His discussion on the Acts of the Apostles

“One point which is beyond question is that the Acts are by the same author as the third Gospel, and are a continuation of that Gospel. One need not stop to prove this proposition, which has never been seriously contested. The prefaces at the commencement of each work, the dedication of each to Theophilus, the perfect resemblance of style and of ideas furnish on this point abundant demonstrations.

The Acts of the Apostles a continuation of the third Gospel.

“A second proposition, which has not the same certainty, but which may, however, be regarded as extremely probable, is that the author of the Acts is a disciple of Paul, who accompanied him for a considerable part of his travels.”

The author of the Acts a disciple and companion of St. Paul.

The argument from the author's use of the pronoun "we" in the Acts of the Apostles.

At a first glance, M. Renan observes, this proposition appears indubitable, from the fact that the author, on so many occasions, uses the pronoun "we," indicating that on those occasions he was one of the apostolic band by whom St. Paul was accompanied. "One may even be astonished that a proposition apparently so evident should have found persons to contest it." He notices, however, the difficulties which have been raised on the point, and then proceeds as follows (p. xiv.)—

"Must we be checked by these objections? I think not; and I persist in believing that the person who finally prepared the Acts is really the disciple of Paul, who says 'we' in the last chapters. All difficulties, however insoluble they may appear, ought to be, if not dismissed, at least held in suspense, by an argument so decisive as that which results from the use of this word 'we.'"

Manuscript evidence and tradition combine in assigning the third Gospel to St. Luke.

He then observes that MSS. and tradition combine in assigning the third Gospel to a certain Luke, and that it is scarcely conceivable that a name in other respects obscure should have been attributed to so important a work for any other reason than that it was the name of the real author. Luke, he says, had no place in tradition, in legend or in history when these two treatises were ascribed to him. M. Renan concludes in the following words:

"We think, therefore, that the author of the third Gospel and of the Acts is in all reality Luke, the disciple of Paul."

M. Renan's conclusion.

Now let the import of these expressions of opinion be duly weighed. Of course M. Renan's

judgments are not to be regarded as affording in themselves any adequate basis for our acceptance of the authenticity of the chief books of the New Testament. The Acts of the Apostles and the four Gospels bear on their face certain positive claims, on the faith of which they have been accepted in all ages of the Church, and they do not appeal, in the first instance, to the authority of any modern critic. But though M. Renan would be a very unsatisfactory witness to rely upon for the purpose of positive testimony to the Gospels, it will be acknowledged that his estimates of the value of modern critical objections to those sacred books have all the weight of the admissions of a hostile witness. No one doubts his perfect familiarity with the whole range of the criticism represented by such names as Strauss and Baur, and no one questions his disposition to give full weight to every objection which that criticism can urge. Even without assuming that he is prejudiced on either one side or the other, it will be admitted on all hands that he is more favourably disposed than otherwise to such criticism as we have to meet. When, therefore, with this full knowledge of the literature of the subject, such a writer comes to the conclusion that the criticism in question has entirely failed to make good its case on a point like that of the authorship of St. Luke's Gospel, we are at least justified in concluding that critical objec-

The value of
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tions do not possess the weight which unbelievers or sceptics are wont to assign to them. M. Renan, in a word, is no adequate witness to the Gospels; but he is a very significant witness as to the value of modern critical objections to them.

To illustrate our meaning, let us take a definite example. Less than four years ago the author of the work entitled *Supernatural Religion*, published what he described as his "complete edition," which he had carefully revised throughout. This work was received with great acclamation by the chief literary representatives of sceptical opinions, and its statements were widely quoted as embodying the final results of impartial criticism. In its first edition the author had maintained that there was no evidence of our present third Gospel being in existence before the time when Marcion the heretic, who flourished about the year 140, put forth a Gospel to suit his peculiar views. The author of *Supernatural Religion* maintained through several editions that Marcion's Gospel was the original, and that our third Gospel was expanded from it. This view, however, he has been compelled to abandon by the researches of Dr. Sanday; and he now admits "that our third Synoptic existed in Marcion's time;" so that we find evidence of its existence "about the year 140, and it may of course be inferred that it must have been composed at least some time before that date."

Admission
of the
author of
*Super-
natural
Religion*.

This is not the only point, as we shall see, on which this writer had to abandon positions which he had asserted with the utmost assurance. But although thus compelled to surrender an important point in his argument, he still asserts (vol. III., p. 39) that "there is no evidence whatever that this Luke had been a travelling companion of Paul, or that he ever wrote a line concerning him or had composed a Gospel." We are further told (p. 50) that "a very large mass of the ablest critics have concluded that the 'WE' sections were not composed by the author of the rest of the Acts . . . and that the general writer of the work, and consequently of the third Gospel, was not Luke at all."

His
confident
assertions.

Still more positively it is laid down that—

"a careful study of the contents of the Acts cannot, we think, leave any doubt that the work could not have been written by any companion or intimate friend of the Apostle Paul."

Such language would naturally lead the reader to suppose that there was a substantial agreement of independent critics in favour of these conclusions, and that none but uncritical supporters of "traditional" views adhered to the old beliefs. But we have called a witness whose admissions on this point have an unimpeachable value, to prove that criticism has established no such negative conclusions. In the face of it all, M. Renan "persists in believing" that the Acts were written, in the form we now possess them, by a companion of

Negative
conclusions
not
established.

St. Paul, and that this companion was no other than St. Luke, who was also the writer of the third Gospel. We are justified, in view of this testimony, in concluding that the critical objections are not only destitute of any such positive, scientific, and convincing character as is sometimes claimed for them, but that such weight as they possess is entirely counterbalanced by other critical considerations. In other words, there is nothing left in respect of the third Gospel to weigh against the positive testimony of all ancient authorities, and that testimony therefore has every claim to be accepted.

The positive testimony in respect of the third Gospel has every claim to be accepted.

We have thus arrived at this conclusion,—that the third Gospel was really written, in the form in which we now possess it, by St. Luke, the companion of St. Paul in several of his journeys, and particularly on his last visit to Jerusalem and in his subsequent journey to Rome. Now this one point being established, it will be found that all serious objections to the belief of the Church respecting the authenticity of the other Gospels are practically obviated. For it follows that the claim put forward in the preface to the third Gospel is completely justified. St. Luke was not indeed himself an eye-witness of our Lord's life on earth; but he claims to have had "perfect understanding of all things from the very first;" or, as the Revisers render the phrase, to have

The objections to the authenticity of the other Gospels practically obviated by the establishment of St. Luke's authorship of the third.

“traced the course of all things accurately from the very first.” St. Paul, in his intercourse with the Apostles, must have been fully informed of the teaching and the acts of our Lord during His ministry, and through St. Paul, St. Luke must have been similarly cognisant of them. But in his visit with St. Paul to Jerusalem, St. Luke himself must have been in communication with other Apostles, as well as with many other disciples of our Lord who had “compained with them all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among them.” That visit to Jerusalem was about twenty-five years after the crucifixion, when those who had been the actual contemporaries of our Lord were from fifty to sixty years of age, in full possession of their faculties, with their memory still clear and their judgment vigorous. St. Luke must have had abundant opportunities in such company of following up, as he says he did, everything from the very first. “Many,” he says, had already taken in hand to set forth in order a narrative of the same facts “even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eye-witnesses and ministers of the word.” These written narratives he was in a position to test, to complete, and to arrange in better order, by personal inquiry of the same or other “eye-witnesses and ministers of the word.” If, therefore, he was a faithful historian, that which he has recorded for

The sources of St. Luke's knowledge of our Lord's life.

The date of his visit to Jerusalem.

His opportunities of verifying the written narratives existing.

His evidence
was at first
hand.

us is the sifted and well-arranged testimony of eye-witnesses : it is the result of a mass of evidence at first hand.

Comparison
of the
evidence of
St. Luke's
Gospel with
the evidence
on which we
believe the
Annals of
Tacitus.

Now we may well ask whether any better ground for our belief than this could well have been afforded us. All the evidence we can obtain, with respect to the great mass of historical events, is the account of them by some historian who lived at or near the time of their occurrence, and who had reports of them either at first or second hand. This, for instance, is the evidence on which we believe the *Annals* of Tacitus. He was born somewhat before the year 60 A.D., and narrates the history of the years from A.D. 14-68, of which the first forty were before he was born. He was not, therefore, a contemporary of the greater part of the events he narrates, while St. Luke was. But like St. Luke, he had opportunities of ascertaining the facts from eye-witnesses, and as his writings produce the impression that he was a truthful person, of sound judgment, we accept his testimony.

The
guarantees
of a
historian's
trustworthi-
ness.

But it must be observed that for the greater part of the narratives in Tacitus we have no such guarantee as is afforded us by the facts above established respecting St. Luke. What is the utmost guarantee of truth that we could expect from any historian? Surely that, being a contemporary of the events he narrates, he should visit the country and the very spots in which they

are alleged to have occurred, that he should be acquainted with reports of them already committed to writing, that he should be well acquainted with many persons who actually witnessed them, that he should possess the full confidence of such persons, and that he should take pains to make a thorough inquiry into the facts. Very few historians indeed have had the opportunity of fulfilling these requirements. Tacitus, for instance, had no such opportunities for a great part of the events he narrates. But St. Luke had those opportunities in the fullest degree, and he assures us simply and straightforwardly in the preface to his Gospel that he made a diligent use of them. The result of such considerations is that in St. Luke's Gospel we possess an account of our Lord's birth, ministry, passion, and resurrection, which embodies the harmonious evidence of eye-witnesses, and which preserves for us the best contemporary evidence which was attainable.

St. Luke fulfilled the necessary requirements.

His Gospel preserves for us the best attainable contemporary evidence.

But it will readily be seen that if the authenticity and credibility of one Gospel is thus clearly established, the inquiry which remains respecting the authenticity and credibility of the other three is immensely simplified. With respect, at least, to the first two Gospels there would seem to remain no sufficient reason why any sceptical critic should trouble himself to dispute their authenticity. For it is unquestionable that they tell substantially the

No sufficient reason remains for disputing the authenticity of the two first Gospels.

Difficulties
in detail.

same story as is told in the third Gospel. There are indeed some points of detail on which it has been found difficult to harmonize them. It is unnecessary for our present argument to discuss these minor difficulties. They are of importance in respect to the relation of the Gospels to one another, and they have also important bearings upon the question of the character of the inspiration which Christians believe was vouchsafed to the writers. But, at the very utmost, they amount to no more than the discrepancies which, as we are reminded every day by discussions respecting the biographies of men recently deceased, continually arise between the accounts of truthful contemporaries and eye-witnesses. We are not here admitting that such apparent discrepancies in the Gospels are real. We only say that, even if they exist, they are of such a minor character as not to affect materially the substantial harmony of the narratives, or to impair their general trustworthiness. But from this it follows that if any one of the first three Gospels was written by a contemporary, and is a record of contemporary evidence, both the others might be. If criticism can adduce no sufficient reason why the third Gospel should not be, as it purports to be, written by St. Luke, it can hardly be worth its while to expend much subtlety in disputing the tradition that the first Gospel was written by St. Matthew,

Apparent
discrepan-
cies do not
affect the
substantial
harmony or
general
trustworthi-
ness of the
Gospels.

and the second by St. Mark. St. Luke's Gospel, we have seen, is a record of the accounts current among Apostles and contemporaries of our Lord respecting His ministry. Consequently, it is only to be expected that other records written by members of the same company, at about the same period, should be substantially of the same character. One positive piece of evidence suffices to outweigh any number of mere doubts and objections. In view of what has been said, we are forced to the conclusion that the story told by St. Luke is the story which was harmoniously told by the contemporaries of our Lord in Palestine. If so, there is at least no reason arising out of the story itself why St. Matthew and St. Mark should not have written the two Gospels attributed to them.

Other contemporary records likely to be substantially similar to St. Luke,

But of course in the interests of the Christian faith, and for the purposes of Christian instruction, it is of the highest interest and importance to know whether the objections which have been raised against the authenticity of the Gospels attributed to St. Matthew, St. Mark, and St. John can be sustained; and with respect to the two former Gospels this question may be dealt with even more simply and briefly than in the case of St. Luke. Here again, it is only reasonable to start from the uniform tradition of the earliest ages on the subject. As is said by Holtzmann,¹ a rationalistic critic,

But it is important to examine objections to the other Gospels.

¹ *Die Synoptischen Evangelien*, p. 359.

Holtzmann's
admission
about
St. Matthew.

"The first canonical Gospel was entirely and unanimously attributed by the ancient Church to the Apostle Matthew."

As the same critic observes, this is the more remarkable, since there is nothing in what is otherwise known of Matthew to account for the first Gospel being attributed to him (p. 360):—

"That the early Church must have had some ground in facts for referring the first Gospel to this name must seem the more probable, since, with this exception, the person of Matthew is entirely in the background in the history of the apostolic age."

Presumptive
evidence of
the author-
ship of the
first Gospel.

In other words there was no reason why it should have been believed that St. Matthew wrote the Gospel except that he did write it; and therefore, as has been urged before, the tradition has, on the face of it, a claim to be believed in the absence of evidence to the contrary. But, in the first place, there is positive evidence to the fact that St. Matthew did write a work of the general character of our Gospel. There is one valuable piece of early Christian testimony preserved to us respecting the authorship of the two first Gospels. It is contained in a fragment of a work by Papias, who was Bishop of Hierapolis, in Asia Minor, in the first half of the second century, and who was a hearer of the Apostle St. John. It is natural that we should have but little discussion of the authorship of the New Testament writings in early times, if they were really genuine. Christians in such case would accept them without hesitation; and it

The
testimony of
Papias.

would be only as time went on, and heresies arose, or the Church came into conflict with heathen culture, that doubts on this subject would be raised. The evidence of Papias is therefore particularly welcome, and it has been scrutinized, by believers and unbelievers alike, with the utmost keenness. With respect to St. Matthew, he is quoted by Eusebius (*Hist. Eccl.* iii. 39), as saying that

“Matthew composed the Oracles in the Hebrew tongue, and each one interpreted them as he could.”

His testimony has reference to the whole Gospel.

There has been much dispute as to the exact meaning of the term “oracles,” here used. Some writers have endeavoured to make out that it is only applicable to sayings or discourses; and that consequently the work by St. Matthew which was known to Papias can only have been a collection of our Lord’s sayings, and cannot have been a narrative of His ministry, like our present Gospel. Even if this restricted interpretation of the word could be maintained, it would be evidently pressing the argument too far to assume that such a collection excluded all narratives of facts; but it has been conclusively shown that the word bears no such narrow meaning. It is the same word as is used by St. Paul when he says (*Rom.* iii. 1) that the Jews had the keeping of the oracles of God, by which he evidently means the Old Testament Scriptures as a whole, including the narrative books. At the utmost, the fact that St. Matthew reports with special prominence and

It includes the narratives as well as the discourses.

fulness several of our Lord's discourses would be sufficient to answer the meaning of such an expression. Thus we have two positive facts from which to start—the one, the fact that our first Gospel was uniformly attributed to St. Matthew from the earliest times; the other, the express statement of a disciple of St. John that St. Matthew wrote a work of this kind. Whether St. Matthew, besides writing the original Gospel in Hebrew, subsequently translated it himself into Greek, or whether our present Gospel is another work of the same kind which the Apostle also wrote, are secondary points. From these two facts it is reasonable to accept our first Gospel as St. Matthew's work, in the absence of decisive critical objections. Before considering the value of such objections, we will next inquire what positive evidence we have respecting the Gospel of St. Mark.

Here again, there is absolute unanimity in the belief of the earliest times. No doubt was expressed for long centuries as to the truth of the title which attributed the second Gospel to St. Mark. This person is generally acknowledged to be the same as the "John, whose surname was Mark," mentioned several times in the Acts of the Apostles, as well as in the Epistles of St. Paul and St. Peter. He was the cousin of Barnabas, and is called by St. Peter (1 Pet. v. 13), "My son," perhaps as having been converted by him. His mother

Two facts to start with concerning St. Matthew's Gospel.

The conclusion from the facts specified.

The second Gospel unanimously attributed to St. Mark in the early centuries.

was the Mary in whose house in Jerusalem the Christians are described as meeting in the earliest days after the foundation of the Church (Acts xii. 12). He accompanied Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey; and though there was a temporary separation between him and St. Paul, he is afterwards mentioned by that apostle as one of his most valued attendants. At another time, as we have seen, he was with St. Peter, and Papias tells us that he acted as St. Peter's interpreter. He was, therefore, at least as much as St. Luke, in a position to ascertain the truth respecting our Lord's ministry. In his case also the tradition of antiquity is supported by the evidence of Papias. That writer related that "the elder," who was either St. John the Apostle or a presbyter contemporary with the Apostle, gave him the following account:—

St. Mark the companion of Paul and Barnabas.

St. Mark the interpreter of St. Peter.

"Mark, having become the interpreter of Peter, wrote down accurately everything that he remembered, without however recording in order what was either said or done by Christ. For neither did he hear the Lord, nor did he follow Him; but, afterwards, as I said, [attended] Peter, who adapted his instructions to the needs [of his hearers], but had no design of giving a connected account of the Lord's oracles [or discourses]. So, then, Mark made no mistake, while he thus wrote down some things, as he remembered them; for he made it his one care not to omit anything that he heard, or to set down any false statement therein." ¹

The testimony of Papias concerning St. Mark.

¹ We have availed ourselves of Bishop Lightfoot's translations, given in his article on "Papias," in the *Contemporary Review* for August, 1875.

Appeal to
M. Renan.

Now, if these statements of Papias apply to our present Gospels, they furnish invaluable evidence as to their early date and as to their authorship. Once more we will ask M. Renan to tell us how far in his opinion the criticism by which this applicability is disputed has made out its case. In his Preface to his *Life of Jesus* (p. li.), after reciting the testimony of Papias, he says,—

“It is certain that these two descriptions correspond well enough to the general physiognomy of the two books, now called ‘The Gospel according to Matthew,’ and ‘The Gospel according to Mark,’—the first being characterized by its long discourses; the second being specially anecdotic, much more exact than the first in the details, brief to the extent of dryness, poor in discourses, and but ill put together.”

His
conclusions
respecting
additions to
St. Mat-
thew's and
St. Mark's
Gospels un-
warranted.

This surely is sufficient for practical purposes; and considering the slightness of the account of Papias, such a general correspondence as is here admitted would seem as much as could be required. M. Renan, however, goes on to lay upon Papias's words that undue stress already noticed, and to argue that the work of St. Matthew which Papias had before him can only have contained discourses, and that therefore subsequent additions must have been made to it, out of which our present Gospel has arisen; while, on the other hand, additions have been made to the original St. Mark, in order to supply its omissions, and to make it more like St. Matthew's work. Of any such revision of the original forms of these two Gospels there is not a single trace

of external evidence, nor does M. Renan pretend to produce any; and the best means of estimating the weight to be attached to such a suggestion is afforded by further conclusions expressed by himself. As the result of his inquiries into the value of the four Gospels he expresses himself as follows:

No external evidence of such revision.

“To sum up, I admit the four canonical Gospels as serious documents. All go back to the age which followed the death of Jesus. But their historical value is very diverse. St. Matthew evidently deserves peculiar confidence for the discourses. Here are ‘the oracles,’ the very notes taken while the memory of the instruction of Jesus was living and definite. A kind of flashing brightness at once sweet and terrible, a Divine force, if I may so say, underlines these words, detaches them from the context, and renders them easily recognisable by the critic” (p. lxxxi.).

The value of the Four Gospels according to M. Renan.

St. Matthew deserves ‘une confiance hors ligne’ for our Lord’s discourses.

Now, we ask with what reason it can be maintained that a Gospel like that of St. Matthew deserves “peculiar confidence” in its most characteristic and most vital elements, but that this confidence is at once to be withdrawn from it wherever a critic like M. Renan fails to appreciate the importance or the vividness of its observations. If a witness comes into court, and is found to be absolutely trustworthy in a vital and characteristic portion of his evidence, would it be deemed reasonable to say that he is not to be believed in the other part of his evidence because you do not like it, or do not understand it? Let us take a particular instance. That from which M. Renan and all sceptical critics shrink in the Gospel narratives is, as we shall have further occasion to observe, their mira-

The miraculous element in the Gospel narrative offends M. Renan and sceptical critics generally.

The miraculous narratives in the 8th and 9th chapters of St. Matthew's Gospel.

culous element. Now, the eighth and ninth chapters of St. Matthew's Gospel contain a record of ten of our Lord's miracles, and these are one half of the whole number recorded by that Evangelist. But this record of all these works of supernatural power and mercy immediately follows the Sermon on the Mount. In the three chapters preceding this miraculous record, St. Matthew has preserved to us, with a vividness and force of which the most sceptical are sensible, a long discourse by our Lord of the most momentous import, which is universally felt to embody some of his most characteristic teaching. Now, is it not a strange paradox to suppose that in a record which is marked, as almost all admit, by a substantial unity of design, we should pass immediately from such teaching as that of the Sermon on the Mount to a similarly long narrative of wholly untrustworthy reminiscences? In the one passage, we are surrounded with a blaze of moral and spiritual light, piercing to the very thoughts and intents of the heart, burning up all falsehood in word or deed, all hypocrisy and unreality; and in the next passage we are asked to believe that we find ourselves in an atmosphere of illusion, credulity, and uncertainty. Such a transition from absolute light—light undimmed, unobscured by a single shadow, unperverted by a single false colour, may well be regarded as inconceivable. But it is the same throughout the Gospels. Many of our Lord's most

Following the Sermon on the Mount in a record marked by unity of design they must be trustworthy.

precious sayings are inseparably bound up with His miracles, arise out of them, and point their lessons. The two are indissolubly united; and the Sermon on the Mount is thus itself the best guarantee for the miraculous narratives which immediately follow it.

The words and acts of our Lord inseparably connected.

See *The Gospel and its Witnesses* by the author of this Tract, Lecture V.

In short, when M. Renan allows that Papias's language corresponds "very fairly" (*assez bien*) to our present Gospel of St. Matthew, and that the discourses, at all events, in that Gospel deserve "peculiar confidence," he at any rate justifies us in concluding that criticism can make out no such case against the authenticity and credibility of the book as deserves to be put in the balance against the unanimous external evidence in its favour. But with respect to the Gospel of St. Mark, his admissions are even more striking and decisive.

No case made out against the authenticity and credibility of St. Matthew's Gospel.

"The Gospel of St. Mark," he says (p. lxxxii.), "is the one of the three first which has remained the most ancient, the most original, and to which the least of later additions have been made. The details of fact possess in St. Mark a definiteness which we seek in vain in the other Evangelists. He is fond of reporting certain sayings of our Lord in Syro-Chaldaic. He is full of minute observations, proceeding, beyond doubt, from an eye-witness. There is nothing to conflict with the supposition that this eye-witness, who had evidently followed Jesus, who had loved Him and watched Him in close intimacy, and who had preserved a vivid image of Him, was the Apostle Peter himself, as Papias has it."

What is this but to say that criticism has failed to establish any valid objections against the traditional belief of the Church, that the Gospel of

Nor against St. Mark's authorship of the second Gospel.

St. Mark is the book of which Papias spoke as having been written by St. Mark from the narratives of St. Peter, and that it contains the very reminiscences of that apostle ?

General estimate of the value of modern critical objections to the authenticity of the Gospels.

Let us, then, consider what is the general result of this review of the evidence for our first three Gospels, and of the validity of modern critical objections, as estimated by the most famous sceptical critic of our generation. M. Renan, with all these objections before him, being as well qualified by his learning as any scholar, whether in this country or abroad, to judge of such criticism, and being necessarily predisposed by his disbelief of Christian truths in favour of objections against the credibility of the sacred writings, nevertheless finds himself obliged to come to the conclusion that the old traditions respecting the first three Gospels are at least substantially true. He admits that all four Gospels were written in the age following the death of our Lord, and therefore while many of His contemporaries were living ; he admits that the third Gospel, as well as the Acts of the Apostles, were written in their present form by St. Luke, who was St. Paul's intimate companion, and who visited Jerusalem with him ; he admits that the discourses of our Lord, at all events, in the first Gospel were recorded by St. Matthew, one of the twelve Apostles, and that they deserve to be accepted with peculiar confidence ; and he further admits that the second

Summary of M. Renan's admissions.

Gospel was in substance written by St. Mark, that it is the most original, in its present form, of the three, that it bears numerous marks of the reminiscences of an eye-witness, and that there is nothing to lead us to doubt the ancient tradition that this eye-witness was St. Peter himself.

In short, this is the result of modern criticism as represented by M. Renan : that in St. Matthew we have our Lord's teaching recorded by an Apostle himself ; in St. Mark we have the vivid reminiscences of another Apostle, who was one of the three most intimate with our Lord ; and that in St. Luke we have the mature and deliberate record of a cultivated writer, who, being a physician, was also trained in habits of observation, after a careful inquiry from contemporaries, amidst the very scenes where the events he records were transacted. We repeat that we do not rest these facts respecting the first three Gospels on M. Renan's investigations. They stand, in the first instance, on the direct evidence of historic tradition, by which the authorship of all other books is determined. But we appeal to M. Renan as affording abundant proof that modern criticism has produced no arguments sufficient to counterbalance, or even seriously to affect, this evidence.

Results of
modern
criticism as
represented
by M. Renan

The facts he
admits rest
on the direct
evidence of
historic
tradition,
but his
admissions
show that
modern
criticism
has not
shaken the
evidence.

We now turn to the Gospel of St. John ; and vehement as has been the controversy on this subject, the case in favour of its authenticity

The evidence
of the
authorship
of the fourth
Gospel.

admits of being more simply and decisively stated than even the case of the first three Gospels. In the first place, the primary evidence to its authorship is peculiarly definite and direct. Irenæus, who became Bishop of Lyons about 177 A.D. was a pupil of a famous disciple of St. John, Polycarp, who died as a martyr in the year 155 or 156. Irenæus tells us, in a letter of remonstrance he wrote to a fellow-pupil, Florinus, who had lapsed into heresy, how vividly he remembered Polycarp's instructions and conversation :

The testi-
mony of
Irenæus.

"I distinctly remember," he says, "the incidents of that time better than events of recent occurrence ; for the lessons received in childhood, growing with the growth of the soul, become identified with it ; so that I can describe the very place in which the blessed Polycarp used to sit when he discoursed, and his goings out and his comings in, and his manner of life, and his personal appearance, and the discourses which he held before the people, and how he would describe his intercourse with John and with the rest who had seen the Lord, and how he would relate their words. And whatsoever things he had heard from them about the Lord, and about His miracles, and about His teaching, Polycarp, as having received them from eye-witnesses of the life of the Word, would relate altogether in accordance with the Scriptures." (*Euseb. Hist. Eccl.*, v. 20.)

By the
Scriptures
he meant
the Gospels.

In order to appreciate what this involves, we must ask what Irenæus meant by the "Scriptures." Of course the expression must refer to those portions of the Scriptures which narrate the life of our Lord, and Irenæus has stated in a memorable passage what these records were. In the third book of his great work on *The Refutation*

and Overthrow of Knowledge falsely so-called, he relates briefly, says Bishop Lightfoot:¹

“the circumstances under which the four Gospels were written. He points out that the writings of the Evangelists arose directly from the oral Gospel of the apostles. He shows that the traditional teaching of the apostles has been preserved by a direct succession of elders, which in the principal churches can be traced man by man, and he asserts that this teaching accords entirely with the evangelical and apostolical writings. He maintains on the other hand, that the doctrine of the heretics was of comparatively recent growth. He assumes throughout, not only that our four Canonical Gospels alone were acknowledged in the Church in his own time, but that this had been so from the beginning. His antagonists indeed accepted these same Gospels, paying especial deference to the Fourth Evangelist; and accordingly he argues with them on this basis. But they also super-added other writings, to which they appealed, while heretics of a different type, as Marcion for instance, adopted some one Gospel to the exclusion of all others. He therefore urges not only that four Gospels alone have been handed down from the beginning, but that in the nature of things there could not be more nor less than four. There are four regions of the world, and four principal winds; and the Church therefore, as destined to be conterminous with the world, must be supported by four Gospels, as four pillars. The Word again is represented as seated on the cherubim, who are described by Ezekiel as four living creatures, each different from the other. These symbolize the four Evangelists, with their several characteristics. The predominance of the number four again appears in another way. There are four general covenants—of Noah, of Abraham, of Moses, of Christ. It is therefore an act of audacious folly to increase or diminish the number of the Gospels. As there is fitness and order in all the other works of God, so also we may expect to find it in the case of the Gospel.”

Bishop Lightfoot's summary of the testimony of Irenæus.

The passage thus summarized by the present learned Bishop of Durham is to be found in the first eleven chapters of the third book of the work

¹ *Contemporary Review* for August, 1876, p. 413.

of Irenæus just mentioned, and its immense significance for the purpose of our argument will readily be perceived. The four Gospels we now possess constituted, in the view of Irenæus, an essential part of "the Scriptures." The reasons he gives for the necessity of their being four in number may be fanciful, but they are adduced in order to explain what he represents as a fact. He appeals, however, to Polycarp's authority, and his view therefore respecting the four Gospels must be in harmony with what he had learnt at Polycarp's feet. The conclusion, therefore, cannot fairly be avoided that Polycarp himself, St. John's own disciple, knew and recognized all four Gospels, not only those of St. Matthew, St. Mark, and St. Luke, but that which was attributed to his own master, St. John. When Irenæus tells us that Polycarp used to describe "his intercourse with John and with the rest who had seen the Lord;" and that "whatsoever things he had heard from them about the Lord and about His miracles and about His teaching," he would relate "altogether in accordance with the Scriptures," he tells us nothing less than that what Polycarp had heard from John, and from the rest who had seen the Lord, was in complete agreement with our present Gospels of St. Matthew, St. Mark, St. Luke, and St. John. That Irenæus used precisely the same Gospels as are now in our

Irenæus
appeals to
Polycarp.

The four
Gospels
known to
and
recognized
by Polycarp.

Irenæus used
the same
Gospels as
are now in
our pos-
session.

possession is disputed by no one; and these very books he says are in full agreement with what he heard from Polycarp, and Polycarp heard from St. John.

These Gospels agree with what he heard from Polycarp and what Polycarp heard from St. John.

Now, this testimony to the first three Gospels is of immense weight, for it gives at all events the sanction of Polycarp, and goes far to give the sanction and recognition of St. John himself, to those three books. But with respect to the Gospel of St. John it would seem overwhelming. The one point upon which Polycarp was specially qualified to bear testimony to Irenæus, and on which he did bear testimony, was the teaching of St. John, and that Apostle's account of our Lord's words and works. If, then, St. John was not the author of the fourth Gospel, is it conceivable that Irenæus should not only have been ignorant of the fact, but that he should have treated that Gospel as part of "the Scriptures," and have declared that it was in entire conformity with what he had heard from his aged master? If the Gospel was by St. John, it must have been written before the year 100, and it must have been in circulation in Asia Minor at the time when Irenæus was a disciple of Polycarp. The book must have been in their hands, and Polycarp certainly must have known whether or not it was the work of his own master. We have therefore the declared and solemn evidence of a man whom

Irenæus could not have treated the fourth Gospel as part of the Scriptures if St. John had not written it.

The date of St. John's Gospel.

No doubt of St. John's authorship is expressed in early times by anyone who knew the facts.

we may call the spiritual and literary grandchild of St. John, with the implied evidence of St. John's own child in the faith, to the fact that that Apostle was the author of the fourth Gospel. We have only to add that in early times no doubt respecting St. John's authorship is expressed by any writer who was in any way likely to be acquainted with the facts; and it may be confidently asked whether more direct and positive testimony to the authorship of an ancient work could be obtained or desired?

It would need an enormous preponderance of critical difficulties to justify the rejection of such evidence. We are asked to doubt the very eyes and ears, the very mind and heart, of two of the best witnesses in all Christian antiquity; and what are the objections on the strength of which this demand is made upon us? We take M. Renan once more as a fair exponent of the force which these critical objections possess, and we are content to ask him to what they amount. The result will be scarcely credible to many readers; but they may easily verify for themselves what we say. He practically confesses that every objection is insufficient except one; and what is that? Simply that in M. Renan's opinion the discourses of our Lord recorded by St. John are

M. Renan's one insuperable difficulty is the discourses of our Lord recorded by St. John.

“pretentious tirades, heavy, badly written, making but little appeal to the moral sense.” (Introd. to *Vie de Jésus*, p. lxi.)

This extraordinary opinion, which will need no refutation for most English readers, remains M. Renan's sole substantial ground for rejecting St. John's authorship. At the end of a long appendix he concludes that there are only two alternatives :

"Either the author of the fourth Gospel was a disciple of Jesus, an intimate disciple, and from the most early period ; or else the author, for the purpose of giving himself authority, has employed an artifice which he has maintained from the beginning of the book to the end, with the view of making it believed that he was a witness in as good a position as possible for narrating the truth of the facts" (p. 537, 15th edition).

The only alternatives according to M. Renan.

In other words, as M. Renan goes on to admit, the author is either St. John, or he is a liar.

"There is no question here of legends, the creation of the multitude, for which no person in particular is responsible. A man who, to procure credence to what he narrates, deceives the public not only respecting his name, but still more with respect to the value of his testimony, is not a writer of legends, he is a forger" (p. 538).

M. Renan fully admits the difficulty of such an alternative, and confesses as the result of all this discussion that

The difficulty of such an alternative.

"at a first glance it seems that the most natural hypothesis is to admit that all these writings—the Gospel and the three Epistles—are really the work of John, the son of Zebedee."

Why does not he accept this "natural hypothesis"? He mentions, first, one or two objections which are of no real weight, and which have been given up by other rationalistic writers—such as that the Greek in which the fourth Gospel is written is very different

The Greek of the fourth Gospel really an argument in favour of St. John's authorship.

M. Renan's dislike to the discourses his main objection.

The general character of the narrative, according to him, in favour of St. John's authorship.

from the Palestinian Greek of the other books of the New Testament. But this, as has been often observed, is a strong argument in favour of St. John's authorship; for if he lived for thirty years, from A.D. 70-100, in so thoroughly Greek a city as Ephesus, he would be likely to acquire a purer Greek style than any of his fellow-apostles. M. Renan falls back, as his main objection, on his dislike to the discourses in the fourth Gospel.

"The ideas, above all, are of an order entirely different from those in the other books of the New Testament. We are here in full Philonian, and almost Gnostic metaphysic. The discourses of Jesus as reported by this pretended witness, this intimate disciple, are false, often insipid, and impossible."

That is all. As to the general character of the narrative in itself, it is all in favour of St. John's authorship:—

"Considered in itself, the narrative of the material circumstances of the life of our Lord, as furnished by the fourth evangelist, is superior in point of verisimilitude to the narrative of the other three Gospels" (p. 536).

M. Renan notices elsewhere the little traits of precision in the narrative:—"the sixth hour:"—"it was night," "his servant's name was Malchus;"—"they had made a fire of coals, for it was cold;"—"the coat was without seam;" and he speaks of characteristics which are

"inexplicable on the supposition that our Gospel was nothing more than a theological composition without historical value, but which are intelligible if we refer them to the reminiscences of an old man" (p. lxxviii).

There is, in a word, a lack of internal as well as external evidence in support of the belief of Irenæus and Polycarp on this subject; but it is all to be thrown aside simply because M. Renan cannot endure the exquisite discourses which the fourth Gospel records!

Such is the weakness of the objections which criticism is able to adduce against the genuineness of the Gospel of St. John, according to the testimony of the most famous sceptic of modern times. The truth is that, as was stated last year by Dr. Bernhard Weiss, one of the most learned scholars of Germany, the disciples of Baur, the founder of the Tübingen school, have been compelled

The weakness of the objections against the genuineness of St. John's Gospel.

“step by step to concede one after another of the testimonies against which he contended. Every new discovery since his time . . . has positively refuted contentions of criticism which had long been obstinately maintained.” (*Leben Jesu*, i., 92.)

One of these recent discoveries is perhaps worth mention. Tatian, the disciple of Justin Martyr, was said by tradition to have prepared a harmony of our four Gospels, called the *Diategma* or *Diatessaron*. Of course if he did, the four Gospels must have been of recognized authority in his own time and in that of his master, a consideration which alone would take us back to the first half of the second century. Accordingly, like the author of *Supernatural Religion*, who has taken great pains to maintain that there was no sufficient evidence of

Tatian's *Diatessaron*.

The author of *Supernatural Religion* denies that Tatian wrote any such work.

Tatian having written any such harmony at all; and more than this, that

“it is obvious there is no evidence of any value connecting Tatian’s Gospel with those in our canon” (vol ii., p. 157, 1879).

At the very time these words were published, only four years ago, a work by an eminent Christian father had been recovered, which is regarded by the general assent of German scholars as a commentary on Tatian’s Diatessaron; and hence even sceptical critics now generally admit that Tatian did weave into one harmony the very four Gospels which we now possess. In short, as M. Renan is acute enough to perceive and candid enough to admit, all the external critical objections against the authenticity of our four Gospels have successively broken down more or less fatally; and there remains no other objection to be made to them than that some critics cannot understand or account for them.

Some readers may perhaps be disposed to think that the last sentence involves a rather harsh judgment, and it is a statement we should not make unless, as we shall observe in conclusion, it were made by the critics themselves. It would be natural to ask, at the close of such an inquiry as this, how it is that if the critical objections against the Gospels are so baseless, they should have been maintained with such persistency by scholars so learned and so earnest as those who have been the leaders of the negative schools in Germany for the

Most
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prepare a
harmony of
the four
Gospels
which we
possess.

The reason
of the
persistency
of negative
criticism in
face of the
evidence in
favour of
the Gospels.

last fifty years. It is only to be explained on one supposition, and that is that they started with a prejudice against the truth of the Gospel narratives, and they were concerned at almost any cost to justify their disbelief. Again we say that this is a charge we should not have ventured to advance except on their own confession and avowal; but as the avowal has been made by them, again and again, it is equally necessary and just that they should be held to the consequences of it.

The avowals
of sceptics.

It will be sufficient on this point to quote the testimony of Dr. Karl Hase, one of the most venerable scholars of Germany, whose *Life of Jesus*, published more than fifty years ago, was the first work of the kind, who represents on the whole a decidedly rationalistic view, and who has lately reviewed the whole course of the controversy in his *History of Jesus*, published in 1876. He there (p. 124) says that the novelty of the mode of treatment adopted by himself, and by Strauss and his successors was that the chief writers of this school laboured in all earnestness, and with all the resources of science, "to represent a purely human life, founded on purely human writings." That is, they started from the supposition that our Lord's life was purely human, and therefore could have had nothing miraculous about it. Their avowed object therefore was, by some means or other, to explain away the miraculous narratives

Their mode
of treatment
according to
Dr. Karl
Hase.

Everything
supernatural
must be
explained
away.

Strauss'
theory.

Baur's
theory.

contained in the Gospels. Strauss expressed this prejudice in the plainest language by saying that "that which could not have happened did not happen;" and consequently the problem for the critic was to explain how four writers like the authors of our Gospels came to say with such circumstantiality that things which could not have happened did happen. His explanation was that the stories of the Gospels grew up as myths, embodying certain religious and political ideas which were then afloat. That explanation was given up as inadequate, even by his immediate successor, Baur. But Baur started from the same prejudice, and set himself a similar task. The theory which he and his followers maintained was that the Gospels were very late productions, which had been written with the specific "tendency" or purpose of maintaining special views—Petrine, Pauline, or Johannine—of the principles of Christianity. They invented ingenious combinations for this purpose; but as Dr. Hase, who admires them, though he differs from them, observes

"the uncertainty of a negative result was exhibited in this case also; and for Baur also the decisive reason is the marvellous and impossible character of the contents of the Gospels" (p. 143).

So Baur himself said (*Canon. Gospels*, p. 530) that

Baur's main
argument
for the later
origin of our
Gospels.

"the capital argument for the later origin of our Gospels remains always this—that each of them for itself, and still more all of them together, represent so much in the life of Jesus in a manner in which in reality it never could have happened."

Thus, says Dr. Hase,

“The criticism of the Gospels comes back to the criticism of the Gospel history ; . . . and the question arises, whether the Gospels do really relate what is so impossible ?”

Dr. Hase thinks that the sacred narratives can after all be explained away into something natural and ordinary, only magnified by excited imaginations; and something of the same kind is M. Renan's view, although the explanations of these two writers differ very widely. But M. Renan also bases the whole of his argument on the supposition that miracles are impossible.

Dr. Hase's view.

“If,” he says, in the Preface to his thirteenth edition, (p. ix.,) “miracles and the inspiration of certain books are realities, my method is detestable. If miracles and the inspiration of books are beliefs without reality, my method is a good one. But the question of the supernatural is decided for us with perfect certainty, by the single consideration that there is no room for believing in a thing of which the world offers no experimental trace.”

Renan on the impossibility of miracles.

Accordingly M. Renan, in his turn, must find some means of explaining away the Gospels. But, as we have seen, he is compelled to admit that all attempts to trace their authorship to a later age than that of the apostles, or, in the main, to other hands than those of their traditional authors, has failed; and so he endeavours to explain them as a kind of romance.

His explanation of the Gospels.

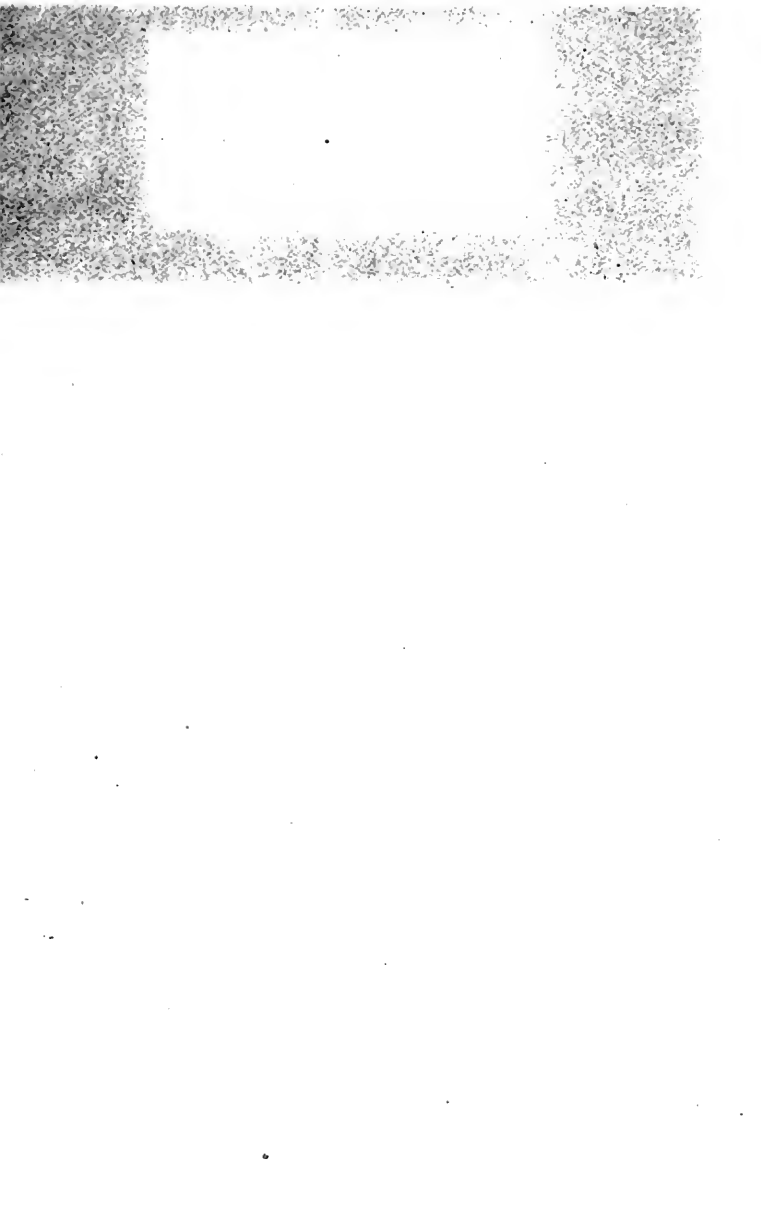
In view of these facts it will now be seen that the difficulties connected with the history of the four Gospels have never, at any time, been

Objections to the Gospels have never been based on candid and unprejudiced criticism.

The good faith of the evangelists.

Criticism has been unable to establish any serious objection against the authenticity of the Gospels.

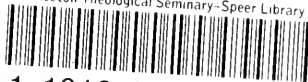
based upon candid and unprejudiced criticism. They have been raised in the interest of a criticism which started with foregone conclusions, and their authors have been driven back from post to post, and have had to take refuge in one arbitrary theory after another. The "natural hypothesis" has always been what M. Renan declares it is now in respect to the fourth Gospel,—namely, that St. Matthew, St. Mark, St. Luke, and St. John were the real authors of the four books which bear their names, and that they are faithful witnesses to what actually occurred. It is remarkable that if we put out of sight the hypothesis of Baur, now confessedly exploded, that the four Gospels were of late origin, and written with a controversial purpose, no serious critic impugns the good faith of the writers. The only possible objection which remains is that all four writers were utterly deluded as to what they "saw and heard and handled." Other tracts of this series have dealt and will deal with that extravagant supposition. Our concern has simply been to show that we possess in the four Gospels contemporary records by competent witnesses, and that criticism has been unable to establish any serious objection against this belief.



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The authenticity of the four Gospels

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